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Import Form**Form Type:** OTHER - Other**Date:** 05/13/2021**Title:** (U//~~FOUO~~) Rolling Stone article, "The Fort Bragg Murders," dated 04/18/2021**Approved By:** SSRA [REDACTED]b6
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(U//~~FOUO~~) UNSUB(S); SPC ENRIQUE ROMAN-MARTINEZ - VICTIM; CAPE LOOKOUT, NC (USNP); GOVERNMENT RESERVATION; HOMICIDE; MAY 22-23, 2020
(U) UNSUBS;
WILLIAM JOSEPH LAVIGNE (VICTIM);
TIMOTHYJAMES DUMAS (VICTIM);
FORT BRAGG MILITARY RESERVATION;
HOMICIDE

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Synopsis: (U//~~FOUO~~) Rolling Stone article, "The Fort Bragg Murders," mentions Timothy Dumas, William Lavigne, and Enrique Roman-Martinez

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lockpicking, and spy-trade craft such as how to shadow people, use dead drops, and live under a cover identity.

Yet it looked as if he had been killed in his sleep. A pair of skimpy running shorts known in the Army as ranger panties were all that he was wearing. He had been shot multiple times in the chest, wrapped in a type of nylon blanket that soldiers call a "woobie," and placed in the back of his own truck, the gray Chevrolet.

No narcotics were reported recovered, but for the Joint Special Operations Command, or JSOC, which is headquartered at Fort Bragg, it had all the makings of yet another drug scandal, the latest in a string of them to hit the special-operations community. Multiple people who knew Lavigne tell me that he regularly snorted cocaine, took MDMA, popped pills, and drank heavily. "It was out of control," says his best friend's wife, Laura Leshikar. "Almost every time I saw Billy, he was strung out on something."

A day after the bodies were found, an unnamed Army official leaked to CBS that both Lavigne and Dumas, at the time of their deaths, were under investigation for trafficking narcotics on Fort Bragg, and that investigators suspected "a double homicide from a drug deal gone wrong."

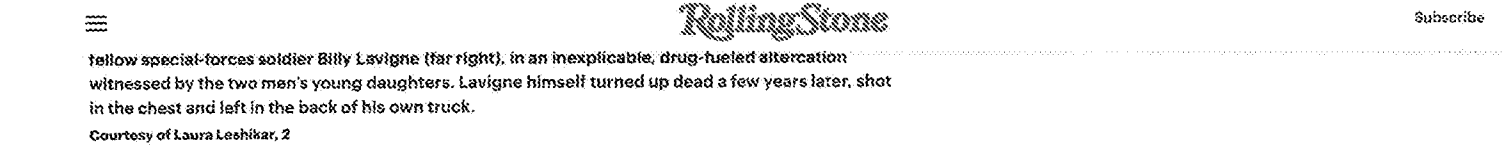
In recent years, whistleblowers have alleged that the use of hard drugs is widespread among special operators. Three unnamed Navy SEALs told CBS in 2017 that various teammates of theirs had tested positive for cocaine, methamphetamine, MDMA, and heroin, and that the substance-abuse problem was "growing." In 2014, a Navy SEAL named Angel Martinez-Ramos pleaded guilty after being arrested at Miami's airport with 10 kilos of cocaine in his carry-on. In 2015, former SEAL James Matthews got pulled over in New Jersey towing a trailer loaded with \$1.4 million worth of marijuana. In 2018, former senior special-forces sergeants Daniel Gould and Henry Royer were busted trying to import punching bags that had been gutted and packed with cocaine from Colombia. These are highlights of a significantly lengthier list.

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In response to these and other embarrassments, including President Trump's pardon of former SEAL Eddie "Freaking Evil" Gallagher, the commander of all special-operations forces, Gen. Richard Clarke, ordered a "comprehensive ethics review" in August 2019. The report, released in early 2020, was mostly a whitewash, full of vague language about improving leadership and accountability. It did cite, however, what it described as "an unhealthy sense of entitlement" among special operators.

Fort Bragg is home to two of the most important formations in the Pentagon's sprawling, complex special-operations bureaucracy: the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, or USASOC, which includes the Rangers and the Green Berets; and JSOC, the "black ops" component of the military. Cloaked in secrecy and sloshing with money, JSOC has operational control over the most elite commando units of each of the major service branches, including the Navy's SEAL Team 6 and the Army's Delta Force, which it uses to carry out the nation's most politically risky, no-fail missions, like the killing of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the emir of the Islamic State, in 2019. Over the past 20 years of continuous war, from the snowy passes of the Hindu Kush to the desert scrublands of Somalia, JSOC's budget and autonomy have continuously grown, and so has the scope of its mission. Based out of a high-security compound inside Fort Bragg, it has become a covert military within the military.





fellow special-forces soldier Billy Lavigne (far right), in an inexplicable, drug-fueled altercation witnessed by the two men's young daughters. Lavigne himself turned up dead a few years later, shot in the chest and left in the back of his own truck.

Courtesy of Laura Leshikar, 2

"Virtually everything to do with this organization is classified," says Sean Naylor, author of *Relentless Strike*, a history of JSOC. "It went from being very rarely used to becoming, in the post-9/11 era, an organization that was running a dozen missions a night around the world."

Those missions often take place in failed states or amid frozen conflicts where the United States has no acknowledged presence, and American soldiers operate in a "grey zone" where morality and ethics are in the eye of the beholder, and everything goes so long as the mission is accomplished and your tactics aren't known to the public or explicitly to the higher-ups," as one former Green Beret writes me from federal prison, where he is doing time for smuggling 50 kilos of cocaine into Florida on a military aircraft. "Elite soldiers have access to whatever they want to get into: whores, guns, drugs, you name it," he writes. "We are far from the flagpole and are expected to be incorruptible."

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The discovery of Lavigne's and Dumas' bodies also raised hard questions for local law enforcement in Fayetteville, which may be home to Fort Bragg, the largest Army base in the U.S., but remains a relatively small Southern town, whose red-brick historical center, built around a white clock tower, quickly gives way to the strip-mall sprawl of discount supermarkets, hamburger drive-throughs, gun stores, and Baptist churches. Dumas had been arrested numerous times in North Carolina on charges ranging from making terroristic threats to impersonating a cop, yet had never been prosecuted. Lavigne, too, managed to escape prosecution on multiple occasions, though he had been suspected of felonies that included harboring an escapee, maintaining a vehicle or dwelling to manufacture a controlled substance, and even murder.

In 2018, Lavigne shot and killed his best friend, a Green Beret named Mark Leshikar, in an inexplicable, drug-fueled altercation that no one witnessed but two little girls. Sheriff's deputies took him to the station, but he was never placed under arrest or charged with a crime. He was taken home that same night by some of his Delta Force teammates. "They are a very hush-hush community," says Diane Ballard, a police detective in the tiny town of Vass, where numerous Delta Force operators, current and retired, own houses. "They do what they want."

Most immediately, though, the discovery of Lavigne's body represented a problem for the leadership at Fort Bragg. Army authorities won't disclose the total number of soldiers stationed there who died in 2020, but Lavigne was one of a spate of homicides and suicides that brought the tally up to at least 44, pushing Fort Bragg to a decisive first-place finish in a race no one wanted to win. It far surpassed Fort Hood, where 28 soldier deaths in 2020 led to a congressional investigation, a sweeping indictment of the installation's "toxic culture," and the dismissal of most of the chain of command. To date, the House Armed Services Committee seems not to have noticed the similar pattern at Fort Bragg.

The deaths began in January 2020, when a 19-year-old Texan's body was discovered in his bunk in an advanced state of decomposition; the Army has not disclosed the cause, and one year later, the investigation remains ongoing. The same is true in the case of a young Ohioan, a Green Beret candidate, who in March was found "unresponsive" in his barracks. In late May, a 21-year-old enlisted man from California was killed — beheaded, in fact — while on a camping trip with six of his fellow paratroopers; once again, no arrests have been made in the case. In November, yet another soldier, a 24-year-old Texan, was discovered "unresponsive" in his bunk, with no further details from the Army. By the end of the year, there had been 21 suicides at Fort Bragg, more than at any other U.S. military post.

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To cap off a freakish year at Fort Bragg, just three weeks after Lavigne and Dumas turned



at any moment. Keith's mom, Lynda Lewis, tells me that her son should have been expelled from the Army back in 2016, when he assaulted Sarah and got into an armed standoff with the Fayetteville police. "He called me and said, 'Mom, I've got a gun to my head. I hurt Sarah, and my career is ruined.' I talked to him for a long time. He finally put the gun down." In the aftermath, Lynda says, "There were no real repercussions."

Maj. Dan Lessard, a spokesman for Lewis' unit, the 1st Special Forces Command, says Cumberland County declined to prosecute and that there was insufficient evidence for a court-martial, but that Lewis did receive "non-judicial punishment" and was directed to receive substance-abuse and marriage counseling.

The problems persisted. According to Sarah's mother, Rhonda Phillips, on at least two occasions in 2020, the last being December 11th, Sarah reported Lewis to his unit, and informed them that she feared for her safety. "She had called his unit because he had been drinking real bad and using steroids, and asked that he be moved back into the barracks," says Phillips. "They didn't do anything."

"So far, we have not been able to determine that that call on the 11th of December actually happened," says Maj. Lessard. "We're still looking into it."

What is known is that on December 22nd, Sarah dialed 911 and fled to a neighbor's house. Lewis followed her outside, holding their three-year-old daughter on one hip and a gun in the other hand. As Sarah pounded on the neighbor's door, he opened fire on her. The onslaught totaled the neighbor's car, which Sarah tried to hide behind. As she lay dying, her baby girl was born; she was going to be named Isabella, but she did not live. The three-year-old was either let go by Keith or slipped free, and went running into the arms of one of the officers who responded to the scene. With multiple police pistols pointed at him and officers shouting at him to drop the gun, Lewis raised his weapon and shot himself in the forehead.

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"Fort Bragg needs to be 'blown up,'" that is, exposed to scrutiny, says Tammy de Mirza, Sarah's aunt. She has photos of a tub of used syringes found in Lewis' closet, including vials of drostanolone propionate and trenbolone acetate, both of which are illicit anabolic steroids that can cause severe mood disturbances.

She's not the only military family member who wants answers. "It's real strange," says Bill Lavigne Sr., father of the slain Delta Force soldier, "that something like this can go on at Fort Bragg, and nobody seems to know nothing. They're covering something up. That's the way I feel about it."



Fort Bragg is the largest military base in the U.S. and the command post for the Army's most elite units, such as Delta Force and the Green Berets, which have borne a disproportionate burden of America's never-ending wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, undergoing "not just combat trauma and moral injury" but a lot of traumatic brain injuries as well.

Airman 1st Class Clayton Cupit/U.S. Air Force



the longest period of war in U.S. history. "He fell in love with what he was doing and decided he was going to make a career out of it," says his dad, who still lives in the remote Upper Peninsula of Michigan where Billy grew up skateboarding and riding motocross. Billy joined Special Forces in 2006, became a Green Beret, and over the next decade averaged about one deployment a year.

His father didn't always know where he was in those days. "Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan," he says, "pretty much anywhere the U.S. had anything going on between 2006 and 2018, he was there." By 2012, he had made the ultra-selective cut for Delta Force, which rejects the overwhelming majority of Rangers and Green Berets invited to try out.

In May of that year, he met Mark Leshikar, another stubborn, hardheaded country boy from way up north. Leshikar was a native of rural Idaho and had lived in Washington state, near the Canadian border. He was two years younger than Lavigne and had recently completed Special Forces selection, a rugged, punishing Fort Bragg program known as the Q-course. They quickly became the best of friends.

"More like brothers," says Leshikar's 31-year-old sister, Nicole, who spent three weeks hanging out with them in February 2018. She and her husband, a Navy submariner, were moving to North Carolina, and stayed for a time at Leshikar's apartment. "There were two people that my brother insisted that I meet," she says, "and Billy was one of them."

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Nicole, a spiritual life coach and Reiki energy teacher, says Lavigne was different from the other off-duty operators her brother hung around. "I'm tenderhearted," she says. "I would rather see peace than war. Billy seemed to have ideals that matched mine. He was the oddity amongst the special-forces guys I was introduced to."

In the one picture of Lavigne that exists in the public domain, his official Army portrait, his head looks like a white egg, and his face has the pale and drawn appearance of a man who has just shorn off a beard and shaved his scalp to the skin. "It's a horrible photo," Nicole says, "like he's already dead." In real life, she says, he was more handsome: tall and bald, with a neatly trimmed beard. "Him and my brother had similar features."

Leshikar, bearded and scowling in most photos, was six-foot-four, with a square jaw, a head of light-brown hair, and tattooed shoulders. "Such a pigheaded, egotistical man" was the first impression he made on his wife, Laura, a 39-year-old paralegal from Hawaii whose dad was a Marine. Over time though, "he grew on me."

Both men had young daughters. Lavigne, who was divorced and had a succession of girlfriends, "loved being a dad," Nicole says. Her brother was the same way. Macho as Leshikar might have been, when his little girl told him that he had to wear a dress to attend her tea party, he didn't argue. "He went out and bought a dress in his size," says Laura.

Nicole and her husband also had small children. When a friend or babysitter could be found to look after the kids, the group of five parents, all in their mid-thirties, went out on the town in Fayetteville. "Full disclosure," Nicole says, "me and Billy and Mark all did coke together."

On multiple occasions, she saw other special operators snorting cocaine, too. "There were a couple others that were with us," she tells me, "drinking and partying. Everybody seemed to know the same people. They all knew Billy."

Laura echoes Nicole's account when I speak to her separately. "They've done coke in front of me," she says. "Other operators that were there. Sometimes when I would walk into Billy's house, it was just everywhere."

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She personally observed, on "two or three" occasions, "the same four guys" cutting up and snorting lines of white powder. She believed them to be his fellow Delta Force operators because they had been introduced to her that way, because she had seen the same men drop him off in a vehicle after a training mission, and because they talked and joked about ops they had been on and constantly tried to one-up one another. "You got 42 confirmed



...large amounts, a spokesman for JSOC, did not respond to certain questions regarding allegations of cocaine and MDMA use among members of Delta Force, and would not say whether operators are tested for drugs. Col. Kara Soules, a press officer for JSOC, also did not respond to questions.

Leshikar's mother, Tammy Mabey, knew her son had a substance-abuse problem. She faults the Army for prescribing him tramadol, an addictive opiate, after he suffered a traumatic brain injury in 2017 from a roadside bomb in Tajikistan. "When he came home, notably, you could see a droopiness in his eye," she tells me.

Over the next year, Leshikar moved on to benzodiazepines, then MDMA, then cocaine. He tried to rationalize it, telling his mom that he and his fellow Green Berets would snort coke to stay awake on sleepless missions. "It's just like taking an antidepressant," he would say. "And I said, 'Well, no, because it's not legal,'" says Mabey.

His use of alcohol was of even greater concern. "When they were doing cocaine," Mabey says, "he always acted perfectly fine. When Marky would spiral was when he drank too much." He would turn to his wife and say things like, "You know I'm a bad person, right? I kill people for a living."

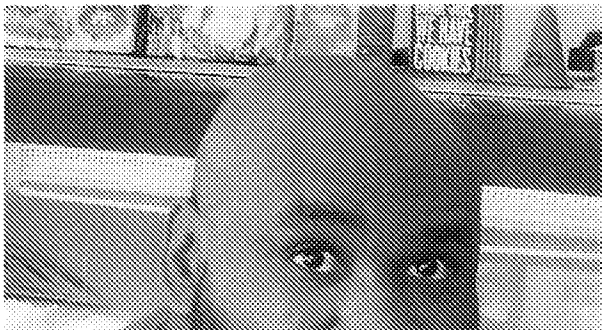
After his dozen-plus deployments, Lavigne was no less haunted by moral injury. A "soulless" expression would come over him, "like he was looking through you," when he got to drinking, Nicole says. He confessed that he had once killed a child soldier. "He was just a boy," she quotes him as saying. "But he had a gun." There was another vivid memory that particularly bothered him: walking through the rubble of a demolished city with a Belgian Malinois, a service dog, and allowing the animal to eat the brains from a dead man's broken skull "as a treat."

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Jessica Donati, the author of *Eagle Down: The Last Special Forces Fighting the Forever War*, tells me that since 2014, the burden of maintaining the United States' never-ending war in Afghanistan has shifted almost entirely onto the Green Berets, who have been used by successive administrations as a "political tool to plug holes in policies that don't work," and to maintain the fiction that the United States has withdrawn from combat operations. Taking part in and witnessing violence, being away from home for long periods of time, and disillusionment with the mission can put special operators at heightened risk, Donati says, of divorce, alcoholism, substance abuse, and anger issues.

"It's not just combat trauma and moral injury," says Naylor. "It's a lot of TBI," or traumatic brain injury. "They might have spent a hundred days where they did 40 raids, and in 15 of the raids they were within 10 yards of a breach explosion. Their brains bounced against their skulls a dozen times on that tour, in addition to calling in airstrikes, or being in an armored vehicle that gets rocked by an IED. All of that has a cumulative effect."

A damaged soul plagued by "mental torment," and also more thoughtful, "more introverted" than his Delta Force teammates, is how Nicole describes Lavigne. "I was like a fly on the wall," she says, "watching their interactions." Unlike his buddies, Lavigne never bragged about the number of people he had killed. He expressed political disagreements with Leshikar, who was of the opinion that the United States ought to nuke the Middle East and be done with it. "They have a different society," Lavigne would respond, in Nicole's recollection, "and while I don't agree with it, we shouldn't be doing what we're doing over there."





Army vet Timothy Dumas, 44, was found shot and killed alongside Lavigne. Law enforcement still has no known suspects in the case. "He was a very hostile individual," says a detective who used to rent a house from Dumas. "I don't get intimidated by people easily. But he scared me."

FBI

In March 2018, Mark and Laura Leshikar took their daughter to Disney World to celebrate her fifth birthday. They were joined by Lavigne, the girl's godfather, whom she called "Uncle Billy," and his daughter, who was like a younger cousin to her. The vacation lasted nearly a week.

Out of view of the girls, Leshikar and Lavigne continued to drink and use drugs. It's known from postmortem toxicology that Leshikar was taking Valium, tramadol, MDMA, and cocaine. "It was his last hoorah," says Nicole, who spoke to her brother for a final time on St. Patrick's Day. "He was getting clean."

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During the eight-hour drive back to North Carolina, Laura split off to take her sister to the airport in Raleigh. Her husband and Lavigne remained with the other car, bound for Fayetteville, with the girls in the backseat.

What followed has never been adequately explained. From outward appearances, the two men simply lost their minds. The details, gleaned from an administrative inquiry by the Army to determine whether Leshikar died in the line of duty, are sketchy: Around 1 p.m., while still on the road, Lavigne texted Laura to tell her that Leshikar was acting paranoid. He was convinced that people were following them. He thought the car was bugged. But when she called her husband on FaceTime, he seemed perfectly normal, leading her to conclude that they were playing a joke on her. "Those two would always pull some shit," she says. "I could never take anything serious."

Around 4 p.m., they arrived at Lavigne's house, a cookie-cutter tract home at the end of a blank cul-de-sac. Leshikar opened the hood of the car, a Honda Accord, and with the engine still hot, began to disassemble it. This led to a physical fight, a wrestling match on the driveway. Lavigne then grabbed the girls, took them inside of the house, and locked out Leshikar.

Both girls witnessed what happened next. "Daddy was mad at Uncle Billy for locking the door," Leshikar's daughter told her mother and grandmother. Hearing her father call her name, she went and let him inside. "Daddy started walking towards Uncle Billy, and Uncle Billy started shooting him. And I looked at Daddy and it was like he was dancing. And he fell down on the ground and Uncle Billy kept shooting him. And when my daddy looked up, I could see he wasn't there anymore."

Cumberland County sheriff's deputies responded to the scene. Night had fallen, and the suburban cul-de-sac was lit up by emergency lights. Lavigne was transported downtown, but did not remain long in the police station. He told the county investigator that Leshikar had come at him with a screwdriver, leaving him no choice but to shoot in self-defense, supposedly for the protection of the children. It was a story he would later repeat to Leshikar's mother, sister, and wife.

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including from behind. Even if Leshikar had come at him with a screwdriver, "Billy wouldn't just forget how to disarm somebody," Nicole says. "He was trained for that."

The Army officer who did the line-of-duty investigation, a copy of which was first obtained by Jack Murphy of *Connecting Vets*, noted several discrepancies between the statements Lavigne gave and the evidence collected, including the absence of a screwdriver. "Ultimately," he concluded in his March 14th, 2019, report, "I determined that [Lavigne] was NOT credible."

Nevertheless, local officials were satisfied by Lavigne's claim of self-defense. He was never booked, photographed, or taken before a magistrate for a bond hearing. He didn't spend a single night in jail. Cumberland County spokesman Sean Swain says he has "no idea" if Lavigne was drug tested, but seemed to think it unlikely since Lavigne was never arrested, even though he had just used his personal firearm, a .45-caliber handgun, to kill a decorated Green Beret.

Leshikar's killing was ruled a "justifiable homicide," but Swain declines to say on what grounds investigators came to that conclusion. The DA's office did not respond to multiple requests for more information. The sheriff's office refused to share a full investigative report on the incident with the Leshikar family, which, Swain says, is department policy. "Even though it's a closed case," Laura says, "they told us the investigation doesn't see the public eye."

The Army's Criminal Investigative Command, or CID, also concluded that the homicide was justified, likewise for reasons that it refuses to make public. A spokesman, Chris Grey, writes in an email that Cumberland County had "investigative jurisdiction" over the case but that CID thoroughly reviewed all the evidence and interviewed witnesses. "CID rejects any notion that anything but a complete and unbiased investigation was conducted," Grey says.

Tammy Mabey, Leshikar's mom, had spent 18 years in law enforcement, working as a dispatcher, a jailer, and a patrolwoman in California, Idaho, and Nevada. "I was never a detective," she says, "but even the limited crime-scene investigation that I've done tells me these guys are full of shit. Why in the hell would you just let some guy off on murder?"

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"A waste of paper" is how Nicole describes CID's report, which she received in heavily redacted form. "Had it been properly looked into," she says, "all the bodies and drugs that have come in the last two and a half years might have been avoided."

The Navy SEALs have been seared by repeated scandals in recent years, but until Lavigne's mysterious death in December, Delta Force had been spared accusations of drug use in its ranks. Indeed, you would have to pore over the news archives long and hard to find a single negative story on the unit, whose official name is the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, also known as the Combat Applications Group.

JSOC's budget is classified, but it reportedly costs between \$1 million and \$2 million to train the average special operator, and much more has likely been invested in each soldier by the time they reach the level of what's known as a Special Mission Unit, such as Delta or SEAL Team 6. Personnel numbers are also kept secret, but two years ago, a retired Delta Force colonel, a veteran of the Iraq War, told me that the unit is made up of about 250 operators, plus another 2,000 support troops. The colonel used to be involved in selection, he said, and in addition to superlative marksmanship, he would look for introversion and artistic ability in potential recruits. He made it a point to choose guys who played musical instruments or painted. "People not inclined to be team players," he explained, somewhat paradoxically.

In the few photos of Delta Force that exist in the public domain, their faces are blurred or blacked out, their identities classified. In the iconography of American militarism, in the esoteric cult of special forces, the black censor bar across the eyes confers an unmistakably dark prestige. A pixelated face is the apogee of the operator aesthetic, which begins with long hair, a bushy beard, and a checkered keffiyeh worn around the neck. Tier 1 operators have ascended so high in the lethal bureaucracy that they no longer exist. They are ghosts.

Yet their names and faces, as well as the oversize trucks they tend to drive, are well-



incorporates elements of biker culture, and is characterized by beards, tattoos, muscles, sun-faded baseball caps with tattered brims, and concealed handguns. "We have a lot of Delta Force members in our community," says Ballard, the police detective in Vass. "Some of them are really great. Nice, normal people." Others, she says, are "narcissistic," or have some other "character defect" that produces a sense of entitlement, like they can get away with anything.

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Ballard, the only full-time detective in Vass, didn't know Billy Lavigne. But she was acquainted with Timothy Dumas, the 44-year-old veteran who was found dead alongside him. She used to rent a house from him in Carthage, another little town on the periphery of Fort Bragg. She met him in 2013, when she and her husband moved to North Carolina and answered a rental ad he had posted for a small brick house on Barrett Street, an uncurbed strip of asphalt just off the town square.

"He kind of represented himself as an SF operator," she says, though he was just a logistics guy. "He had a strong personality. He was a very hostile individual. You always got the sense from him that he was involved in something illegal, like some kind of crime ring. I thought it was guns because he would talk about all the parts he had access to, and all the guns he could get."

At the time, Ballard had recently left the Navy and had yet to join the police or become a detective. One evening in October 2013, Dumas came over to fix an electrical outlet, and Ballard had the distinct impression that he was hitting on her: "He was trying to pry about where my husband was." She told him they were separated at the moment. "That's when he made the statement that if I wanted my husband gone, he could take care of it," she says. "That he would take care of him permanently. I did not get the impression that he was joking. He was deadly serious."

She pretended to laugh it off, and when Dumas left to get a part from the hardware store, she called her neighbors to come over and sit with her. She also retrieved her Glock from the bedroom and stuck it under a couch cushion. "I don't get intimidated by people easily," she says. "But he scared me."

In his LinkedIn photo, Dumas looks fairly nondescript. He stands in front of a parking lot at night, a middle-aged, broad-chested black man with a shaved head, dressed in whiskered jeans and a shirt with vertical stripes. He is unsmiling, his eyebrows raised, his eyes intently focused on the photographer. The camera flash has rendered his retinas red.

He left the military in 2016, and for a time operated a nightclub in Fayetteville, which evidently brought him legal troubles. He was repeatedly arrested for possession of untaxed liquor, failure to return rented property, and permitting a minor to consume alcohol. But in each case, the charges were dismissed.

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According to Dumas' wife, the nightclub "doesn't exist anymore. The entire building and surrounding area was demolished and built up new." At her house, a tidy single-story place with Christmas wreaths in the windows and a yard full of pine needles, she refuses to come to the door. Through the intercom she says that she is "just as clueless as anyone else" and that she and Dumas "led separate lives."

In early 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic descended on the United States, his run-ins with the law became more frequent. On March 28th, the Fayetteville police responded to an incident in which he was suspected of shooting into an occupied dwelling. Though the offense was a felony, he was not charged.

"Just because it was dismissed doesn't mean it didn't happen," says Ballard, who believes that military personnel are given special treatment within the criminal-justice system in the counties around Fort Bragg. "I've seen it. They'll show up in their Class A uniforms looking all distinguished and get sympathy: 'OK, dismissed. Thank you for your service. Have a nice day.'"

I go to the location listed on the incident report to learn more, and find four people, two men and two women, living in a one-bedroom apartment in a drab complex near Cross



small black hole in the wall: "The guy who fired a shot through here."

The other woman, whom I'll call Estella, tells me the story in English. It was late at night and she was out front smoking a cigarette. "Out of nowhere," she says, "this tall, baldheaded black dude comes up with a skinny black guy with dreads. He tells me I should go smoke in the back because there's going to be a shooting."

Estella thought he was joking. His rudeness annoyed her. Dumas and his dreadlocked sidekick went into the apartment across the corridor, and she went into hers. A few minutes later, she began to record a video of her little godson dancing on the living-room carpet. She shows me the brief clip on her phone. A small boy about waist high is dancing next to a laundry hamper to music from the television. You can clearly see the moment a small black hole appears in the sheetrock, blowing out a cone of gypsum powder. The 9mm round, fired from a Taurus Millennium G2, missed the boy by about 18 inches.

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Estella called the Fayetteville police, who filed an incident report. It included Dumas' name and the type of handgun he used, but it's not clear if he was taken into custody. Fayetteville Police did not respond to multiple requests for more information. Estella doesn't know if he was still on the premises when the cops arrived. She and her whole family had gone into the back bedroom to hide. In any event, there is no court record showing that he was ever prosecuted.



Enrique Roman-Martinez of Fort Bragg's 82nd Airborne Division was beheaded during a camping trip with six other soldiers.
37th Brigade Engineer Battalion

Two days after Dumas and Lavigne were found dead, more details emerged on an earlier Fort Bragg killing: the death of Specialist Enrique Roman-Martinez, who had gone missing over Memorial Day weekend on a camping trip to the North Carolina shore with six of his fellow paratroopers. Roman-Martinez's partial remains had washed up on Shackleford Banks a few days later, but in the six months since then, few details had been forthcoming.

Finally, on December 4th, authorities released the autopsy report, and it left no doubt of foul play. According to the medical examiner, Roman-Martinez had been decapitated. Only his severed head had been found. It showed multiple chop injuries, a broken jaw, lacerations, and fractures of the cervical spine. His injuries were not done by a shark or



was an HR specialist, a guy whose job it was to maintain personnel records. He wore camouflage but sat in a cubicle. He was from a suburb of Los Angeles called Chino.

"We were always poor growing up," his sister Griselda says. Her brother enlisted for a steady paycheck and for the GI Bill. His dream was to go to pharmacy school. "He'd read an article about hallucinogenic mushrooms," she says. "That was the only drug he was for; everything else he was against. He sincerely felt it was the key to mental illness, a cure for depression, PTSD."

Roman-Martinez had poor eyesight and wore thick glasses above a friendly smile. Recent surgeries to his legs had left him unable to run well. Words his sister uses to describe him include "gentle," "spiritual," and "feminist." "He was a hippie, a believer in crystals," she says. "He was trying to get into Buddhism. Me and my mom being Catholic, it was difficult to understand."

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Fort Bragg was on quarantine and soldiers forbidden from traveling far from base, but seven paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division snuck off for a Memorial Day weekend camping trip at Cape Lookout National Seashore, a barrier island on the gray coast of the Carolinas. On Friday night, there was a thunderstorm. The next day around 7 p.m., one of the campers called 911. "We lost our friend," he told the dispatcher. "We don't know where he has gone." He added, "When we woke up he was not here. We've been looking for him all day. We were trying to find the park ranger or their offices, or anything."

That last part wasn't true, it later emerged. The island is small, with few trees and a thick crowd of people that weekend. Early Saturday afternoon, park rangers had approached the group from Fort Bragg to ask them to move their vehicles, which were encroaching on protected sand dunes. "At no time during that interaction did they mention a missing person," a spokesman for the National Park Service told ABC11.

The young soldier who called 911 also told the dispatcher, unprompted, that Roman-Martinez had "suicidal tendencies," which his sister strenuously disputes. So does his best friend, 21-year-old Christian Romero, who is also a paratrooper stationed at Fort Bragg, but in a different unit. He was deployed to Saudi Arabia when he read on Facebook that Roman-Martinez, whom he'd known since middle school, had gone missing.

"That broke me," Romero says. "He was the rock in my life." He doesn't believe the story told by the other six campers that Roman-Martinez simply wandered off at night, leaving his phone, wallet, and glasses behind in the tent. "Enrique was blind as fuck without his glasses," Romero says. "He loves views, too. He's one of those guys who's into nature. He would leave his phone and wallet for sure, but not his glasses. No way."

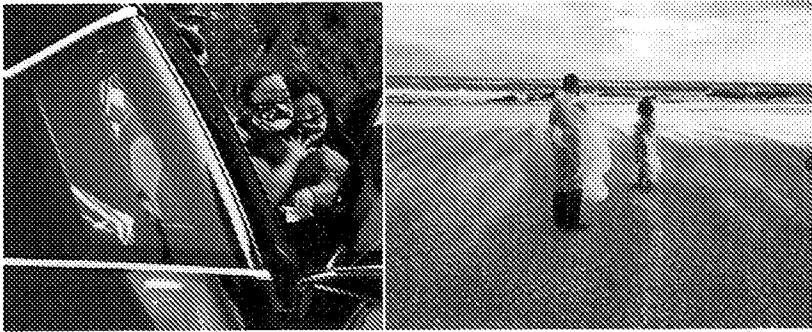
Romero knows one of the other paratroopers who was on the camping trip. He once saw him using LSD at a barracks party, he says. Acid is the most commonly abused substance on post, in Romero's estimation, because people think it's impossible to detect through urinalysis (it's not). On several occasions, various people at Fort Bragg have offered to sell him tabs, Romero says, including the soldier from the camping trip. "Maybe drugs could have been a reason why this happened," he speculates, without elaborating. When I ask if his best friend ever took LSD, Romero says, "Yeah. Maybe. Uh-huh."

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"CID is aware of the deceased's alleged drug activities," Grey, the CID spokesman, says. "We have not ruled anything in or out as the investigation continues."

This May will be that investigation's one-year mark, and no suspects have been identified. Army investigators have disclosed nothing, not even the identities of the other soldiers who were on the camping trip, one of whom was a young woman. "We asked and begged them so many times," Griselda says, "and they just refuse to tell us who these people are." But Grey says that the Privacy Act forbids them from releasing the names.

"When they found my brother's remains, he didn't even have eyes. Fish ate them," Griselda says, and begins to cry. She wipes away tears. "Just a while ago the FBI went and



"When they found my brother's remains, he didn't have eyes. Fish ate them," says his sister (above at her brother's funeral and on the beach where his remains were found). His death was ruled a homicide.

Keith Birmingham/MediaNews Group/Pasadena Star-News/Getty Images; 37th Brigade Engineer Battalion

The FBI is also investigating the deaths of Dumas and Lavigne, and has taken the lead in the case, according to CID. On February 2nd, the Charlotte field office put out a bulletin seeking assistance from the public to establish a timeline of the two men's movements up until their deaths. How they knew each other, the nature of their connection, remains a mystery. "Most of Billy's friends or associates, I've talked to or met," says his father. "There was never *no* mention of this Dumas." Nicole and Laura say the same. The only known common denominator between them was Fort Bragg.

"We would appreciate anyone," says Shelley Lynch, an FBI spokeswoman, "who may have information about where the men were in the hours before their bodies were found to contact us." The FBI released a photo of Dumas' truck, a dark-blue 2015 Dodge Ram, which was found "abandoned in another location." They also released a better photo of him. In this one, he is sitting in what looks to be a restaurant booth, dressed in a gray vest and a purple dress shirt.

On April 11th, shortly before the number of Covid-19 cases in the U.S. surpassed 1 million, Dumas had been arrested in Winston-Salem. This time he was charged with three felonies: breaking and entering, communicating threats, and impersonating a law-enforcement officer, but all of the charges were dismissed. On June 20th, in Carthage, he was arrested at a McDonald's for striking a woman with a bag of food. He was arrested for a final time on September 17th, in Fayetteville, this time on a prostitution charge. There is no record of an indictment for either offense.

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As the madness of 2020 settled over the country, bringing with it a nationwide wave of drug abuse and violent crime, Lavigne was also spinning out of control. Ever since he killed Leshikar, he had been in a downward spiral. "He changed dramatically in a short period of time," says his father, who came from Michigan to stay with him after the shooting. "I would see him staring off in space a lot, thinking." On the Fourth of July, he took his son to see the fireworks at Fort Bragg. As soon as the rockets began to burst, "We had to get out of there. He was seeing bad things."

Two months later, someone nearly died of a heroin overdose at Lavigne's house. The police came and he was arrested in possession of cocaine, a digital scale, a crack pipe, a revolver, a hunting rifle, a snub-nosed pistol, and a pump-action shotgun. The next day, he was indicted on two felony charges: harboring an escapee and maintaining a vehicle or dwelling place to manufacture a controlled substance. No one could tell me who the escapee was, or what they had escaped from, but Cumberland County dropped all charges against Lavigne. The DA, Billy West, did not respond to requests for comment but told the *Fayetteville Observer* that two other people who'd been at Lavigne's house took responsibility for the drugs.

"He was getting into all kinds of legal trouble," says Tammy Mabey, Leshikar's mother, "hanging out with bad people, deep into drugs, and nobody said or did anything. He was still a very active, decorated soldier."

One minute after midnight on February 17th, 2020, Lavigne crashed his truck into a



charge was not dropped. But he would be dead before his scheduled court appearance.

The last time his father spoke to him was Thanksgiving. He sounded "somewhat normal," but "anxious" and "preoccupied." Only two months remained before he would become eligible for retirement. At the relatively young age of 37, after a full 20 years in the military, he would be entitled to a substantial pension and lifelong benefits. "He was planning on coming home and building a log cabin on our property," says his dad. "It's the last thing we spoke about."

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The last person to have seen him alive that I could identify is a woman named Jessie Marie Patino, a tattoo artist and junkyard mechanic. She claims to have known Lavigne well, and to have seen him do cocaine, crystal meth, and heroin. One day in late November, she says, she was working on a customer's car when she turned around and there was Billy, wearing a black ski mask and carrying a crossbow.

He was strung out and weeping over Leshikar. "I'm a monster. I killed my best friend," he said, according to Patino. She also claims to have given Lavigne a tattoo on his chest, and her description matches what CID agents described to Mabey: The tattoo includes the initials M.L., for Mark Leshikar, the date he died, and an inscription, "Till Valhalla."

Crime-scene technicians would have photographed it on December 2nd, when they turned aside the nylon blanket he was wrapped in and saw him barefoot and shirtless, shot multiple times in the chest. On a cold evening in late January, when I visit the approximate spot where he was found, the woods are perfectly still and quiet, with not even a bird chirping. An orange sun is setting behind row upon row of monotonous pines.

No one I spoke to had any clue, or even a theory, who the surviving shooter or shooters were. The authorities have kept completely mum. The modus operandi that investigators have shown in these cases is to shut out the public, decline to answer questions, apprehend no perpetrators. That the FBI has taken the lead "makes me feel a little bit better," says Billy's father. "Ain't got much faith in CID."

It's not even clear exactly how many soldiers died at Fort Bragg in 2020. Over the course of several months of correspondence, the public-affairs office eventually disclosed the number of homicides and suicides, but not deaths from accidents and illnesses, which would include drug overdoses. The base's spokesman, Col. Joe Buccino, acknowledged that illegal drug use seems to have been a common factor in all of the homicides that involved Fort Bragg soldiers, but emphasized that all but one of the killings pertained to the special-forces units at Fort Bragg, which he could not speak for. "The things that have happened with special forces are outside the purview of the Fort Bragg command," he says. But neither JSOC nor USASOC responded to repeated requests for comment. Nor would the base discuss the perplexing incidence of young men turning up "unresponsive" in their bunks, such as 19-year-old Caleb Smither, whose body was so decomposed when they found him that he couldn't have an open-casket funeral.

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It was much easier, ironically, to get information on Fort Bragg-based personnel who died in foreign countries. Two from the 82nd Airborne were killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan, and another paratrooper, a combat engineer, lost his life in a vehicle rollover in Syria, for a total of three who perished overseas. It would be an exaggeration to say that Fayetteville must be a more dangerous duty station than Raqqa or Kandahar, and yet piecing together data provided by Col. Buccino, and previous Army disclosures to the McClatchy news agency, as well as reports in the local media, I count no fewer than 44 active-duty deaths at Fort Bragg during 2020. That number is significantly more than at any other U.S. military base, despite Fort Hood and Fort Bliss having had freakishly violent years of their own.

"Everything that's happening at Fort Bragg is horrible," says Lynda Lewis, mother of the Special Forces medic who murdered his pregnant wife. He was a sweet, animal-loving kid who went to Afghanistan at the age of 19 and came back a different person, she says. "He saw people die. He was in an IED blast. He had migraines, nightmares, personality changes."



brain was damaged from TBI or that he was medicated for PTSD. "I have to prove that he was not in his right mind," she says. "I called every day for a month. No one at Fort Bragg will talk to me at all. They say get a lawyer."

"I just don't know what's going on with our military right now," says Mabey. "You would not believe how many people I have reached out to. Nobody would listen."

"My son was the most honest, loyal, patriotic person," she continues. "Did he have demons? Absolutely. Did he struggle with drugs, alcohol, cocaine, tramadol? Absolutely. I don't know any soldier who has done the tours he had done that doesn't."

That was certainly the case with Lavigne. "I think Billy was dealing with his own demons," she says. "Just not very well." In July 2018, around the time he and his dad had to flee from that Independence Day fireworks show, he called Mabey to beg her forgiveness for killing her son. She hung up on him, but later had second thoughts. She sent him a text message and agreed to hear him out on condition they meet at Leshikar's grave site. He didn't respond, she says. "He never responded again."

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UPDATE: After this story went to press, a U.S. Army Special Operations Command spokesperson gave this statement to Rolling Stone regarding how the command handled Billy Lavigne's legal trouble: "Due to his length of service, Master Sgt. Lavigne was entitled to a variety of due process protections. Appropriate adverse action, which was previously initiated in response to substantiated misconduct, was being finalized at the time of Master Sgt. Lavigne's death."

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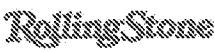
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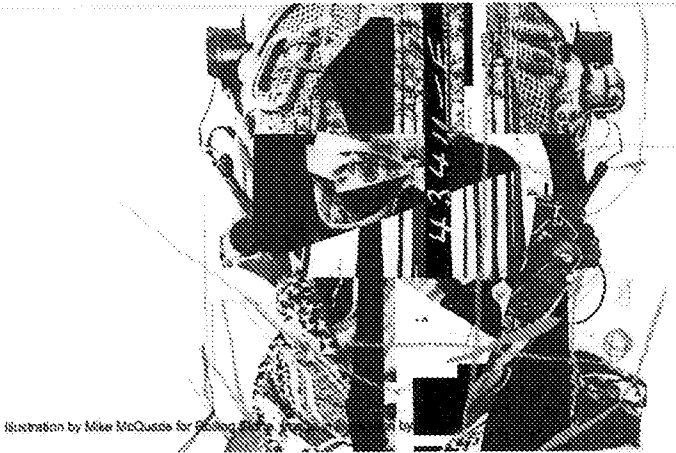


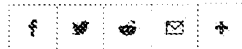
Illustration by Mike McCusker for Rolling Stone. Photo by [unclear]

HOME CULTURE CULTURE FEATURES

THE FORT BRAGG MURDERS

At least 44 Fort Bragg soldiers died stateside in 2020 — several of them were homicides. Families want answers. But the Army isn't giving any

By **SETH HARRP**
APRIL 18, 2021



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Three weeks before Christmas, in the piney woods outside of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, a deer hunter came across the fallout from a firefight that, to date, no one has been able to explain. A tricked-out Chevy Colorado with matte-black wheels and racing tires was stuck in a rut on a dirt road near Lake MacArthur. In the bed of the truck and on the ground beside it were two dead men. Both had been killed by gunshots, and according to news reports, shell casings were scattered on the ground. Yet there were no firearms to be found at the scene, and no trace of the third man, the surviving shooter. There had to have been at least one.

The man on the ground, who had been dropped by a single bullet to the right temple, was 44-year-old Timothy Dumas. People who knew him tell me that in life, he fit a certain kind of American archetype: the wannabe special-forces guy, a fake operator who, in order to impress people or intimidate them, passed himself off as an ex-commando. He had served 19 years in the Army, including time in the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, but as a property book officer, a glorified supply sergeant.

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The man in the bed of the truck, by contrast, didn't have to inflate his military credentials. Not only was he a decorated Green Beret with dozens of badges and patches and medals from 14 different deployments, he was also a member of Delta Force, the most elite military unit in the United States. At age 37, William "Billy" Lavigne II was a true Tier 1 operator, a master sergeant on the Army's most selective and clandestine task force.